

Talking with Your Teen About Sexual Health

FOR PARENTS OF TEENS FROM 13 – 18 YEARS

Be Proactive. Be Prepared.

This resource will help you get ready for the ongoing talks you'll have with your teen about sexual health. If you and your teen haven't talked about sexual health yet, it's never too late to start!



Sexual Health

What sexual health means and what it includes.



Askable Adult

What an Askable Adult is and how to become one.



Values

How to talk about your values around sexual health.



Tips for Talking

Tips for successful and ongoing talks and how to make them even better.



So... What IS Sexual Health?

As a parent, you teach your child about sexual health, not just sex. Sexual health includes things like hygiene, healthy relationships, sexuality and consent.

What is sexual health?

Sexual health is personal, psychological, relational, cultural, physical and emotional well-being related to a person's sexuality. Taking care of your sexual health is as vital as other parts of your health and wellness. Sexual health can include healthy relationships, reproductive health, sexuality, consent, puberty and hygiene.

What about sexuality?

Sexuality is a central part of every human. A person's sexuality includes their sex, gender identity and sexual orientation. It also includes their pregnancy and reproduction choices and experience. A person can express their sexuality in many ways, including through their:

thoughts	values
fantasies	behaviours
desires	practices
beliefs	roles
attitudes	relationships

While sexuality can include all of these, a person may not always express all of them. Many things can affect sexuality. These include things you might expect like biology, psychology, society, religion or culture. Sexuality is also influenced by economic, ethical, political, and legal factors.

The Sexuality Wheel (see next page) shows how broad sexuality is. Each part of the wheel shows one part of who we are. These parts are all connected and influenced by each other. The boxes on the left side of the wheel show who we are, while the ones on the right show who we are taught or learn to be. The wheel moves freely and smoothly. When all parts of our self are healthy, our sexuality is healthy.



A collection of ideas that people see as important; a set of beliefs about how things are.

Who We Are by Nature

Who We Learn to Be

Personality

A combination of traits or characteristics that make up a person's unique character.

Gender Identity

A person's internal sense of identity as woman, man, both, fluid among gender or no gender, regardless of their sex.

Gender Expression

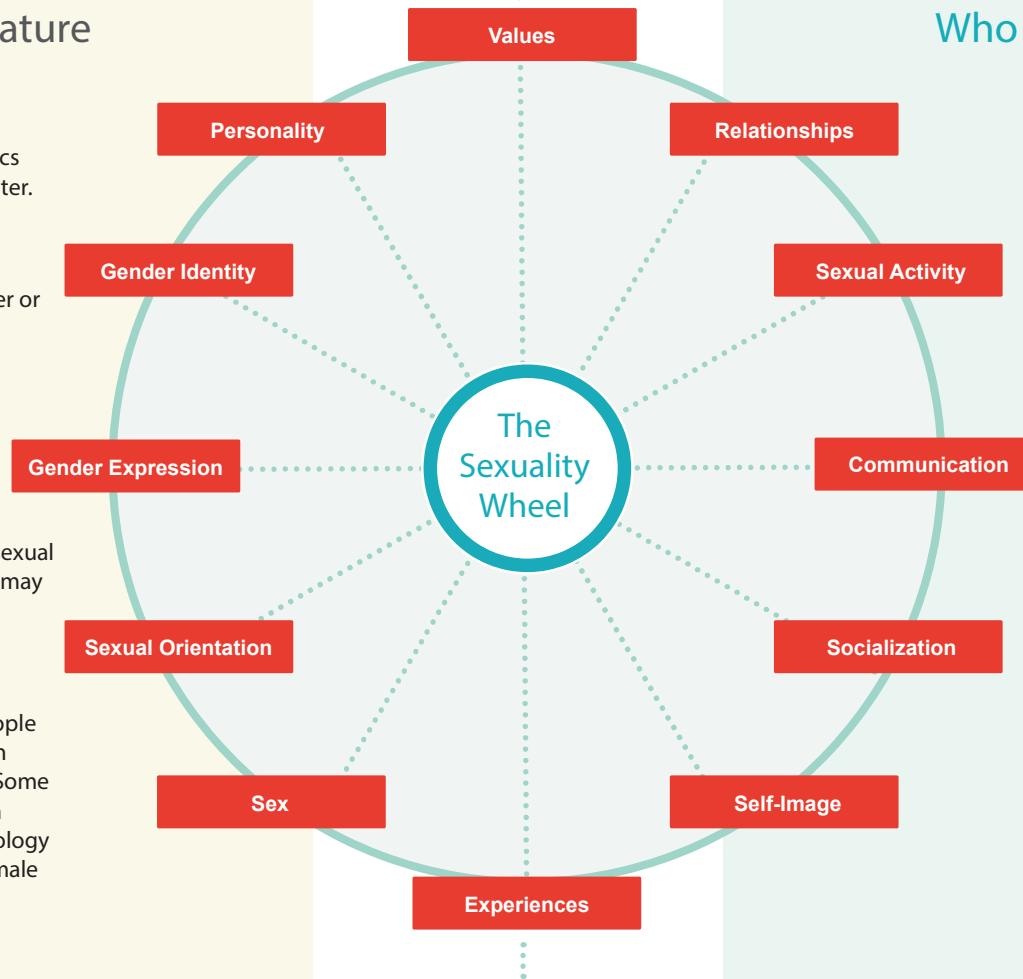
How a person presents their gender. This can include appearance, name, pronoun and social behaviour.

Sexual Orientation

A person's emotional, physical and/or sexual attraction to others. It can change and may or may not be the same as their sexual behaviour.

Sex

Categories (male, female) to which people are typically assigned at birth based on physical characteristics (e.g.,genitals). Some people may be assigned intersex, when their reproductive, sexual or genetic biology doesn't fit the traditional definitions of male or female..



What people have done, gone through, or been exposed to in their life. Personal experiences help form people's values.

Relationships

The way people are connected and how they act toward one another.

Sexual Activity

One way people experience or express their sexuality. Sexual activity includes kissing, sexual touching, and sexual intercourse (e.g. oral, anal, vaginal).

Communication

The way people connect and share information, goals, ideas and create understanding.

Socialization

Learned behaviours that include customs, attitudes and values that are acceptable to a social group, community or culture.

Self-Image

How a person thinks about or sees themselves, including their personality, their appearance and their values.



Your Values

Before you start talking to your teen about sexual health, reflect on the values you and your family hold. Can you explain what you believe and why? Once you are clear, you can share those values and model them for your teen. Below are some questions to help you think about your values.

1

How do you model these values in your everyday life?

Honesty, Respect, Empathy, Responsibility, Accountability

2

Does your teen know and understand how you feel about those values?

3

Does your teen know how you expect them to act when they know and understand your values?



There are many teachable moments in daily life. The news or something happening in your family or to a friend may start a teachable moment with your teen.

These could be current or life events related to consent and sexual assault, bullying and cyberbullying, Internet safety or even a friend or relative who's pregnant.



Your Values

Now it's time to think about how the values you've taught your teen relate to sexuality and sexual health.



Have you talked about your values around sexuality as a family?

Could your teen tell you what your family values are if you asked them?



Does your teen know what your values are around:

- Relationships*
- Sexual Activity*
- Consent*

Relationships

*Do they know how you feel about them dating?
Holding hands? Kissing?
Spending time alone with someone they are interested in?*

Sexual Activity

*Do they know how you feel about them being intimate with someone?
Using different kinds of birth control?
Taking part in sexual activity when alcohol or drugs might be involved?*

Consent

*Do they know how you feel about how important getting and giving consent is?
Consenting to hugging or holding hands?
Consenting to kissing or making out?
Consenting to sex?*



Be an Askable Adult

Being an Askable Adult means that you're easy to talk to, listen, respect a person's right to privacy, and respect the right for a child or teen to feel the way they do.

An Askable Adult:

Knows themselves.

They understand their values and beliefs and communicate them clearly and respectfully.

Knows the basics.

They understand the facts about the human body—like puberty and reproduction—but they also understand what affects a person's sexuality, what a healthy relationship is and what consent means.

Answers questions.

They may have some answers, but not all. When they need to find more information, they know what information can be trusted and they always give the teen who asked an answer.



An Askable Adult teaches their teen through words, by their own behaviour and by how they react to situations, questions and other people's behaviour.



Tips for Talking

As your child enters the teen years, they start to turn to their friends for answers and information. Being an Askable Adult helps your child to know that they can come to you whenever they have questions.

Teens have lots of questions that they may not ask. Talking about sexual health with your teen may be tricky. They've likely started puberty, with all of its changes—including mood swings—and are pushing to be independent. This is a huge time of transition for any teen. They're becoming a young adult who'll soon be responsible for their own decisions and behaviour. It may not seem like it at times, but your teen does care about what you say and do.

Here are a few tips for talking with your teen:

1 Watch for teachable moments.

Talk about and help them understand issues as they come up on TV, in movies, ads, music, social media, the news, in the community and in your social circle. This can also give you an opening to talk about your values and beliefs.

2 Provide resources.

Have resources like books in your home where your teen can get the right information. For reliable resources and community agencies, see the **Resources page on our website**.

3 You don't have to know it all.

Be an active learner yourself. Your teen will teach you just as much as you teach them.

4 Encourage your teen to talk about what they think.

An open exchange of ideas can help clarify the values you each hold. Listen and ask open questions instead of doing all the talking.

5 When your teen asks you a question, do your best to answer it at the time.

If you don't know the answer, suggest that you find out together or tell them you'll find out and get back to them. Don't put it off, as they might think that it's not an okay topic or not important enough to talk about.

6 Demonstrate responsible, health-conscious decisions and behaviour.

Show your teen what healthy relationships and lifestyle choices look like by living them yourself.



7 Play the what-if game.

Ask them a situational question like, “What if you/your partner/your friend got pregnant?” or “What if your friends asked you to do something you weren’t comfortable with?” Do your best not to judge their response, but do talk about the possible consequences of their choices and actions.

8 Speak to them as a mature person.

Use correct terms to show that you respect their age and knowledge. Respect their views and their feelings.

9 Recognize that you can’t control all of your teen’s actions.

Assure your teen that there may be times you don’t approve of their actions but you’ll always support them and will always love them unconditionally.

To learn more, visit teachingsexualhealth.ca